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SUBJECT: Letter to President Obama from Member of Parliament R.
SAMPANTHAN

1. Embassy Colombo received the following letter from Member of
Parliament R. SAMPANTHAN concerning the Tamil National question in
Sri Lanka [BEGIN TEXT]:

21 January 2009

His Excellency Barack Obama
The President of the United States of America
The White House
Washington D.C.
U.S.A.

Dear Mr. President,

THE TAMIL NATIONAL QUESTION IN SRI LANKA

We write to you as the representatives in the Parliament of Sri Lanka of the Tamil people of the Northeast region comprising the Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka - the areas of historical habitation of the Tamil speaking people. Of the 23 Tamil representatives elected to Parliament from the Northeast, 22 belong to our Party.

May we extend to you our warmest congratulations and very best wishes on your assumption of office as President of the United States of America.

Your election to office of President of the USA is a source of hope, encouragement and inspiration to all peoples who seek to be freed from injustice.

We write to fervently appeal that your administration should address the Tamil National Question which has plagued Sri Lanka ever since the country attained independence over six decades ago in 1948. During this period the Tamil people have suffered much injustice.

May we briefly outline the causes for this conflict and its continuance. [note internal numbering]

1. Sri Lanka is inhabited by two distinct Nations of People, the larger Sinhala speaking people and the smaller Tamil speaking people. The Tamil speaking people have been an overwhelming majority in the Northeastern region just as much as the Sinhala speaking people have been in the rest of Sri Lanka. Instead of recognizing this reality, the Sri Lankan State whilst trying to portray an inclusive Sri Lankan civic identity, in fact is entrenched with a Sinhala Buddhist supremacist nationalism that wants exclusive control over the entirety of Sri Lanka. Consequently the Sri Lankan State has failed to enact constitutional provisions that give the Tamil speaking people the right to internal self-determination in the area of their historical habitation - the Northeastern region. This supremacist form of nationalism has resulted in the Sri Lankan State altering the demographic composition of the areas of historical habitation of the Tamil speaking people through State aided Sinhala colonization. Despite this, the Tamil speaking people remain a significant majority in the Northeast.

2. Flowing from 1 above, the denial to the Tamil people of physical security and the denial of the security of their homeland; the Tamil people have been subjected continuously to racial pogroms first in 1956, and thereafter in 1958, 1961, 1977, 1981, 1983 and such violence continues against the Tamil people up to the present. Following such continuous racial pogroms large numbers of Tamil people have left the country and continue to do so.

¶3. Flowing from 1 above, discrimination in the fields of education, public sector employment, health care and social services, economic empowerment and development, and in the utilization of the natural resources in the Northeastern region, to the detriment of the historical inhabitants - the Tamil speaking people.

¶4. The prosecution of the war in the Northeastern region, purportedly to militarily defeat the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), with total unconcern for the immense harm inflicted on the non-combatant Tamil civilians resident therein by aerial bombardment of, and the firing of multi barrel rocket launchers and heavy artillery into Tamil civilian populated areas resulting in death and injury to substantial numbers of Tamil civilians including women, children and infants, the destruction of valuable civilian assets both residential and occupational and the inexorable reduction of a people who have led respectable and contented lives in their historical habitations to a state of destitution and penury. It is our submission that the Sri Lankan State prosecutes the current war in the manner outlined above in the pursuit of a given ideological position - the assertion of a Sinhala Buddhist supremacy throughout the whole of Sri Lanka, and that in order to achieve that objective a process of Genocide of the Tamil people is in progress. The media does not have the freedom to cover the war zone. The United Nations agencies and International Non-Governmental organizations have been directed by the government to leave the war zone. Consequently no independent information is available to the outside world, thereby facilitating the implementation of the government's objectives.

¶5. Sri Lanka's record on human rights is one of the worst in the Comity of Nations. It consequently failed recently to succeed in its attempt to be re-elected to the United Nations Human Rights Council. The repeated requests of the UN High Commissioner for human rights to set up a UN human rights monitoring mechanism in Sri Lanka, to monitor the grave human rights situation particularly in view of the prevalent state of impunity, has been consistently rejected by the Sri Lankan State. An International Independent Group of Eminent Persons (IIGEP) was appointed consequent to international pressure, by the government of Sri Lanka to ensure that a local Commission of Inquiry appointed to investigate certain identified violations of human rights, functioned in keeping with international norms and standards. Consequent to unwarranted government interference the IIGEP have withdrawn stating publicly the reasons for their conclusion that the Sri Lankan State does not have the political or institutional will to inquire into human rights violations in keeping with international norms and standards. Recording of evidence through teleconferencing was being done in two cases. (i) The assassination of 5 students in Trincomalee. (ii) The assassination of 17 aid workers of the INGO "Action Contra la Faime" in Muthur, Trincomalee. In both these cases witnesses had left the country consequent to intimidation. The recording of evidence by teleconferencing has been stopped due to government interference. Four members of the Commission of Inquiry too have subsequently resigned presumably also due to such unwarranted government interference. A Bill entitled "Protection of Victims of Crime and Witnesses Bill" was tabled in Parliament to afford a measure of protection to victims and witnesses. The Bill has now been abandoned. The Commission of Inquiry which was the Sri Lankan State's only visible exercise on human rights has thereby lost credibility. Extra judicial executions, enforced disappearances and other grave human rights violations continue to be a regular feature in Sri Lanka.

¶6. Sri Lanka's purported steps to evolve an acceptable political solution to the Tamil National Question are no more than a mere charade to mislead the international community into the belief that the State is committed to an acceptable political solution. On the contrary the Sri Lankan State has reneged on commitments already made such as the purported de-merger of the merged Northern and Eastern provinces, which were constituted as a single politico-administrative unit under the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement of 1987, on the incontrovertible basis that the said two provinces constituted the areas of historical habitation of the Tamil speaking people. Sri Lanka seeks thereby to unilaterally abrogate an international treaty which it cannot do under International Law. The merger of the Northern and Eastern provinces was accepted by the

international community as the corner stone of the peace process, and the purported de-merger is despite the strongest advice by the international community that the merger should not be disturbed.

The Sri Lankan State we submit is committed to perpetuate the ideology of a Sinhala Buddhist supremacy with all its consequences throughout the whole country. This we submit is the prime cause of the conflict.

The Sri Lankan State today pursues its policies clearly on the basis that it is answerable to no one for whatever it does. This we submit is a very dangerous trend and will inevitably cause immense harm to the Tamil speaking people living in Sri Lanka, instability in the region, and promote majoritarian ethno religious nationalism, authoritarianism and hegemony.


Consequently, we would like to urge that the policy of the United States of America towards the resolution of the Tamil National Question reflects the existence of two distinct Nations of People inhabiting Sri Lanka and where these two nations are encouraged to associate with one another by pooling their sovereignties to form the State.

We would earnestly urge you to utilize your good offices to ensure that the Sri Lankan State in the words of President Abraham Lincoln "thinks anew and acts anew" to ensure justice to all its peoples.

Whilst we sincerely appreciate the very onerous nature of the duties that you have assumed, we seek your indulgence to state that the Tamils in Sri Lanka face extinction as a People. In the circumstances, may we most earnestly urge that our appeal receives your earliest possible attention and that as a first step to a final acceptable resolution of the Tamil National Question, the current war be brought to an end.

Thanking you and with our warm regards.

Yours sincerely,
//s//

 R. SAMPANTHAN M.P.
Parliamentary Group Leader
Tamil National Alliance

[END TEXT]

BLAKE